



## **FCS CHILD SAFE STANDARDS OVERVIEW**

### **Child Safe Standards: Background**

Victoria has compulsory minimum standards for organisations that provide services for children to help protect children from abuse (under Australian law the term 'child' is defined as a person under 18 years of age).

The Child Safe Standards form part of the Victorian Government's response to the Betrayal of Trust Inquiry (the 2013 Parliamentary Inquiry into the Handling of Child Abuse by Religious and Other Non-Government Organisations).

Victorian organisations that provide services to children are required under the Child Safety and Wellbeing Act to ensure that they implement compulsory child safe standards to protect children from harm.

Organisations included are those that exercise care, supervision or authority over children, whether as part of its primary function or otherwise.

It is also essential to note that the following form part of Child Safe Standards:

- 'Failure to Disclose': in addition to mandatory reporting obligations under the Children, Youth and Families Act 2005 (Vic.), the Crimes Act 1958 (amended) (Vic.) imposes a legal obligation upon all adults to report to Victoria Police [in addition to Child Protection] where they form a reasonable belief that a sexual offence has been committed by an adult against a child.
- Failure to Protect': The Crimes Act 1958 (amended) (Vic.) provides that people in positions of authority, such as principals, must take action to protect children where they know that a person associated with their organisation poses a substantial risk of sexually abusing children.
- Grooming': Crimes Act 1958 (amended) (Vic.), under the 'Failure to Disclose' offence and duty of care, any person who suspects a child is being groomed by an adult must report their concerns to Victoria Police.



## **Introduction to Child Safe Standards in Organisations**

The 7 Child Safe Standards aim to create a **Child Safe organisation**.

A Child Safe organisation has good child safe policies and practices to reduce potential environmental risks and keep kids safe. The child safe approach includes education and supervision of both paid and unpaid staff about appropriate and acceptable behaviours. Strong child safety policies and procedures help deter, minimise and remove opportunities for abuse to occur within organisations. They help us be preventative rather than reacting to an unfortunate incident after it happens.

Children have a fundamental right to be safe from any form of abuse. This is a legal requirement as well as a moral obligation.

Education, awareness raising and helping organisations to create and maintain child safe environments will be the initial focus of the Child Safe Standards.

The 7 Child Safe Standards

- Standard 1: Strategies to embed an organisational culture of child safety, including through effective leadership arrangements
- Standard 2: A Child Safe Policy or Statement of Commitment to Child Safety
- Standard 3: A Code of Conduct that establishes clear expectations for appropriate behaviour with children
- Standard 4: Screening, supervision, training and other human resources practices that reduce the risk of child abuse by new and existing personnel
- Standard 5: Processes for responding to and reporting suspected child abuse
- Standard 6: Strategies to identify and reduce or remove risks of child abuse
- Standard 7: Strategies to promote the participation and empowerment of children.

In applying each standard, organisations must reflect and embed key principles in their approach relating to promoting the safety of children with a disability, vulnerable children and the cultural safety of Aboriginal children and children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds.

For more information see: Commission for Children and Young People- Child Safe Standards



To comply with Standard 1 of Ministerial Order 870, The school governing authority must

- (a) develop strategies to embed a culture of child safety at the school
- (b) allocate roles and responsibilities for achieving the strategies
- (c) inform the school community about the strategies, and allocated roles and responsibilities
- (d) put the strategies into practice, and inform the school community about these practices; and
- (e) periodically review the effectiveness of the strategies put into practice and, if considered appropriate, revise those strategies

Child safety and protection requires a commitment from everyone to ensure the environment is safe for all children. For teachers, this includes an awareness of the requirements and risks, a commitment to practices that minimise the risks, and the ability to respond appropriately to incidents of child abuse.

FCS has a Child Safety Statement, requirements and procedures relating to staff and volunteers, and changes to the physical environment, all focused on improving child safety.

Child Safety is part of every Board meeting and is incorporated within staff meetings. It informs how the school is operated and Risk assessments and Registers are used to review, identify and take steps to ensure child safety is maintained.

#### FCS Staff requirements

- All staff and teachers hold a Working with Children Check (as required by the Worker Screening Act 2020) or equivalent
- All staff and teachers sign and abide by the relevant Code of Conduct document
- All staff read and sign off on all Policies and Procedures
- All staff undertake the On-Line Course – Mandatory Reporting
- All volunteers be made aware of our Child Safety Policy, hold a Working with Children Check or equivalent and sign and abide by the relevant Code of Conduct
- All volunteers be aware of the Failure to Disclose law, and report any suspicions of abuse to FCS staff
- All staff should have a thorough comprehension of the FCS Child Safety Policy and meet the FCS requirements listed above.



### **Location of documents and information:**

Hard copies of the Victorian Child Safe Standards and accompanying documentation will be kept in the office, in a folder appropriately marked. These will also be kept electronically under the folder “Child Safety”.

The FCS Child Safe Policy will be made available to the public, electronically on the FCS website and in hard copy.

Incident Reports and appropriate guides for responding and reporting will be made accessible to all staff at all times. Any completed reports need to be submitted to the Principal immediately.

### Statement on FCS Policies

Our policies intend to empower children who are vital and active participants in our organisation. We involve them when making decisions, especially about matters that directly affect them. We listen to their views and respect what they have to say.

We promote diversity and tolerance in our organisation, and people from all walks of life and cultural backgrounds are welcome. In particular we:

- promote the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of Aboriginal children
- promote the cultural safety, participation and empowerment of children from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds
- promote the safety, participation and empowerment of vulnerable children
- ensure that children with a disability are safe and can participate equally

Our policies guide our staff and volunteers on how to behave with children in our organisation.

All of our staff and volunteers must agree to abide by our Code of Conduct that specifies the standards of conduct required when working with children. All staff and volunteers, as well as children and their families, are given the opportunity to contribute to the development of the code of conduct.

### Training and supervision

Training and education is important to ensure that everyone in our organisation understands that child safety is everyone’s responsibility.

Our organisational culture aims for all staff to feel confident and comfortable in discussing any allegations of child abuse or child safety concerns. We train our staff to identify, assess, and minimise risks of child abuse and to detect potential signs of child abuse.



We also support our staff through ongoing supervision to: develop their skills to protect children from abuse; and promote the cultural safety of Aboriginal children, the cultural safety of children from linguistically and/or diverse backgrounds, and the safety of children with a disability and the safety of vulnerable children.

New employees will be supervised regularly to ensure they understand our organisation's commitment to child safety and that everyone has a role to play in protecting children from abuse, as well as checking that their behaviour towards children is safe and appropriate. Any inappropriate behaviour will be reported through appropriate channels, including the Department of Health and Human Services and Victoria Police, depending on the severity and urgency of the matter.

Where possible we will extend this training and supervision to volunteers.

### Recruitment

We take all reasonable steps to employ skilled people to work with children. We develop selection criteria and advertisements that clearly demonstrate our commitment to child safety and an awareness of our social and legislative responsibilities. Our organisation understands that when recruiting staff we have ethical as well as legislative obligations.

We actively encourage applications from Aboriginal peoples, people from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds and people with a disability.

Fitzroy Community School takes all reasonable steps to ensure that it engages the most suitable and appropriate people to work with children. These include:

- Selection criteria in job descriptions
- Police record and identity checks
- Working with Children Checks where VIT registration does not cover an adult in the school
- Face-to-face interviews
- Detailed reference checks from previous employers

The FCS Recruitment and Onboarding Process is followed to ensure that these steps are taken.

All people engaged in child-related work, including volunteers, are required to hold a Working with Children Check and to provide evidence of this check to the administration staff who keep details on record. The administration staff are responsible for maintaining this register and ensuring that the appropriate checks, codes of conduct and related policies have been issued.



### Fair procedures for personnel

The safety and wellbeing of children is our primary concern. We are also fair and just to personnel. The decisions we make when recruiting, assessing incidents, and undertaking disciplinary action will always be thorough, transparent, and based on evidence.

We record all allegations of abuse and safety concerns using our incident reporting form, including investigation updates. All records are securely stored.

If an allegation of abuse or a safety concern is raised, we provide updates to children and families on progress and any actions we as an organisation take.

### Privacy

All personal information considered or recorded will respect the privacy of the individuals involved, whether they be staff, volunteers, parents or children, unless there is a risk to someone's safety. We have safeguards and practices in place to ensure any personal information is protected. Everyone is entitled to know how this information is recorded, what will be done with it, and who will have access to it.

### Legislative responsibilities

Our organisation takes our legal responsibilities seriously, including:

- **Failure to disclose:** Reporting child sexual abuse is a community-wide responsibility. All adults in Victoria who have a reasonable belief that an adult has committed a sexual offence against a child under 16 have an obligation to report that information to the police.
- **Failure to protect:** People of authority in our organisation will commit an offence if they know of a substantial risk of child sexual abuse and have the power or responsibility to reduce or remove the risk, but negligently fail to do so.
- Any personnel who are **mandatory reporters** must comply with their duties.

### Risk management

In Victoria, organisations are required to protect children when a risk is identified. In addition to general occupational health and safety risks, we proactively manage risks of abuse to our children.



We regularly review, identify, assess, and take steps to minimise child abuse risks, which include risks posed by physical environments (for example, any doors that can lock), and online environments.

### Regular review

This document will be reviewed every two years and/or following significant incidents if they occur. We will ensure that families and children have the opportunity to contribute. Where possible we do our best to work with local Aboriginal communities, culturally and/or linguistically diverse communities and people with a disability.

### Allegations, concerns and complaints

Our organisation takes all allegations seriously and has practices in place to investigate thoroughly and quickly. Our staff are trained to deal appropriately with allegations.

We work to ensure all children, families, staff and volunteers know what to do and who to tell if they observe abuse or are a victim, and if they notice inappropriate behaviour.

We all have a responsibility to report an allegation of abuse if we have a reasonable belief that an incident took place (see information about failure to disclose above).

If an adult has a reasonable belief that an incident has occurred then they must report the incident. Factors contributing to reasonable belief may be:

- a child states they or someone they know has been abused (noting that sometimes the child may in fact be referring to themselves)
- behaviour consistent with that of an abuse victim is observed
- someone else has raised a suspicion of abuse but is unwilling to report it
- observing suspicious behaviour